

60 PAGES
SUGGESTED
FOR MATURE
READERS



MS. TREE
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Ms. TREE QUARTERLY

A COMPLETE Ms. Tree Thriller
by MAX ALLAN COLLINS
and TERRY BEATTY

PLUS:

MIDNIGHT

by Edward Gorman
and Graham Nolan

BATMAN

by Dennis O'Neil
and Mike Grell

I WAS SLEEPING.



I WAS DREAMING.



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MY DREAMS AREN'T
ALWAYS SO SWEET



IN MY DREAM,
MY HUSBAND WAS
STILL ALIVE.



VERY ALIVE.



BRRAP!

MY PHONE IS
LAW-1078X.



ONLY A PRECIOUS FEW
HAVE THE NUMBER
DOWN AT TRIPS -
SOMEBODY IN THE
BUILDING. THE
SOUNDING LITTLE
GUY IS MAKING
I THINK.





WHAT?

I HAVE A
PRESENT FOR YOU.

"PRESENT? WHO AS THIS? IT'S THREE-TWENTY-FIVE IN THE GOVERNMENT RECORDS!"

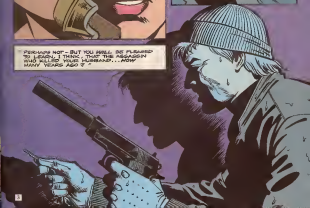


IT'S LATER THAN
YOU THINK
MR. TRICE.

I AM
NOT
HALLUCINATING.



"PERHAPS NOT - BUT YOU WILL BE PLEASED TO LEARN, I THINK, THAT THE ASSASSIN WHO KILLED YOUR HUSBAND...HOW MANY YEARS AGO?"





WAS WAS A CRIME CALL? WITH THE
 CUBANESSE PIP AWAY IN THE LIFT ABOUT
 YEARS, I COULDN'T TAKE THAT
 CHANCE... EVEN THOUGH AN SECURITY
 ALARM SYSTEM WAS ON...

... AND IF ANYONE HAD ENTERED
 WITHOUT THE KEY TO TURN THE CURRENT
 OFF, THAT ALARM WOULD SOUND WITHIN
 THIRTY SECONDS OF ENTRY.



ON THE OTHER HAND, ONE OF THE
 FIRST THINGS A PRIVATE
 DETECTIVE WOULD DO IS "BUT
 THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A
 RELIABLE SECURITY SYSTEM."











Ms. TREE

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GIFT OF

DEATH

WE SCUFFLED. HE HAD A GUN.
SO DID I. I'M ALIVE. HE'S DEAD.

THAT'S THAT. YOUR NEW
ARMED AND DANGEROUS?

MICHAEL. WHAT THE
HELL HAPPENED HERE? I
THINK YOU HAD BETTER
TO YOUR BROTHERS.
YOUR ASSAULTMENT
AND YOUR BROTHER
SECURITY SYSTEM.



IT'S KNOWN RAFE VALER
A LONG TIME. HE WAS
A MONSIEUR LIEUTENANT
NONE

IT TOOK SOMEBODY
HELL TO GET THE
WELL "CONNECTED"
TO STAND IN A FRO
LIKE THIS.



RAFE HAD BEEN A
BROCADE WHEN MY
ALBINO AND TOOK
HIS LINGERING FOR
NAME WAS A COOP FIGHT
YOU - MOVING ALLO, IT
WAS AS A PERSONAL
POTENTIAL THAT HE
WAS IN THE LINE OF
DUTY... WORKING FOR
THE D.A. ON A NEW
INVESTIGATION POLICE
CORRUPTION.



IS THIS A GOOD HT.
MICHAEL? OF THE BROTHER
FAMILY FINALLY GETTING
UP WITH YOU?

AND
AND



CUTE, MICHAEL. HOW ABOUT CAN
THIS GO ON? NOW COME TO YOU
THINK I CAN EXPOSE FOR YOU?"

I SAID NOTHING.



"THE BROTHER FAMILY WOULD
HAVE... RAFE BUREAU... AND
WILL DOMINATE AMERICA...
AND TO WHAT? CAN YOU
HOW MANY OF US... BROTHERS...
WHICH WILL IT END?"

I SAID NOTHING.



"I THOUGHT YOUR HALL WAS IN A STATE OF DISUSE,"
DAVE SAID. "I THOUGHT YOU AND MURDERER'S
SISTER DOMINIQUE HAD AN UNDERSTANDING..."

I SAID NOTHING, BUT I THOUGHT: SO DID I.

WITH THE REASON, I WENT DIRECTLY TO
MURDERER ENTERPRISES INTERNATIONAL.
I HAD MY HAND IN MY PUSHEE, TO PRESENT
MY BUSINESS CARD, IF NECESSARY...



A NINE-MILLIMETER
BUSINESS CARD.

WELL, THEN
TO SEE
DOMINIQUE ABOUT
I DON'T HAVE AN
APPOINTMENT
BUT...

GO
DON'T IN.
NO TREE...



YOU'RE
EXPECTED!



GOOD MORNING, MR. TREE.
I THOUGHT YOU ENJOYED MY
LITTLE PRIZE OFFERING
LAST NIGHT.





ANNOUNCED MY HUSBAND.
ONLY HE WAS JUST A
FRIEND. IT WAS YOUR
BROTHER-IN-LAW DOING.



A close-up of a woman's face, showing her eyes wide open in shock or fear, with her mouth slightly agape. She has dark hair and is wearing a dark top.

BUT THAT IS IN THE PAST. WE'VE ALREADY LOST BRUNO AND THE SUPERHEROES.

BYGONES BE BYGONES!
LADY, KISS ME, I'VE
CAME HERE FOR THE
LAUGHING ACADEMY!

A woman with short brown hair, wearing a red dress with black buttons, is seated at a desk. She is looking down at a document on the desk. In the background, there is a framed picture on the wall and a white object hanging from the ceiling. The scene is set in an office or a formal room.

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"WE DO HAVE MUCH IN
COMMON, MICHAEL.
WE ARE LONELY IN THE
NEW JERSEY WOMEN IN THE
COUNTRY OPTION AREA.
YOU RUN YOUR OWN
BUSINESS, SHALL I TELL
IT IS COMPARED TO ANY
RESPONSIBILITY...."

LIKE ABE, YOU HAVE
MANY RESPONSIBILITIES
BUT FOR YOURSELF
AND FREEDOM, LIKE
ME, THERE IS ONLY
ONE OTHER PERSON
WHO KNOWS YOU
FEEL SOMETHING
... TENSE.

"YOUR STEPHEN - MICHAEL TRELIN - MEANS
EVERYTHING TO YOU... HE'S YOUR LINK
TO YOUR LATE, LOST HUSBAND."

"YOU THREE ARE LINKED INEXORABLY -
THE THREE OF YOU EVEN SHARE
THE SAME FIRST NAME: CINDY.
NAME FOR A WOMAN -
MICHAEL -"

MY FATHER WANTED A
BOY. SOME WOULD SAY HE
DIDN'T EVER GET ONE.
BY THE WAY, YOUR SECURITY
HERE SUCKS.

THAT'S PART
OF WHAT I WANT TO
TALK TO YOU ABOUT.
AND YOU DON'T NEED
THAT GUN.
PLEASE.

LISA - MY DAUGHTER - IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON TO MY LIFE...
AND I WON'T HAVE HER AWAY!
I WON'T ALLOW THAT...



"AS YOU WILL KNOW, WE TREE... MICHAEL...
OUR CHILDREN HAVE NOT YET GOTTEN
OVER THEIR ANGSTREISSE. I HAD THOUGHT
THIS ATTACHMENT, FORMED IN THEIR CHANCE
MEETING AT GREENWOOD ACADEMY WOULD
DURABLE, WITH TIME..."



YOU SHOULD'VE
LET IT RUN ITS
COURSE. INSTEAD
YOU WENT HURRYING
AND - KNOCKING - WHOLE
THAT ASPECT OF FACTIC
ONLY PEOPLE
YOUNG LOVE.



SO I'VE LEARNED
ONE WOULD THINK
A COUPLET SCHOOL
IN SWITZERLAND
WOULD HAVE
BEEN FOR
ENGLISH...



"... BUT ON LIRD OCCASIONAL VISITS
HOME, WHEN EVERY YOUNG LEAVE, AND
NOTHING WILL STOP HERE. NOTHING
I SAY CAN DO."



"I KNOW" I SAID. "AND FOR
SOME OF THE REASON OF LETTING
LISA LISA, HITCHER AWAY
IN SOME OF MY BUSINESS.
IT'S SOME OF MY BUSINESS.
BUT THEN I AM A
DETECTIVE."





BUT IF YOU THINK YOU CAN
"ACCEPT" MY NEGATIVE EFFORT
TO EXHAUSTIVE "THINK YOUR
BUTTER BEARS YOUR LADY.
I DON'T LIKE IT ANY MORE.
TALK YOU DO, BUT IT'S
THOSE LIVES, AND...

AND YOU
UNDERSTAND?

I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WHAT
YOU FEEL IS REAL. THAT IT MAY
IN FACT, BE A STRONG THING
BOTH OF US ARE HOW
NEITHER OF US COULD HELP THEM
AFRAID IF WE WANTED TO.

"NO, MICHAEL - WHAT I PROPOSE IS THAT THE
THINGS AND ACTIONS PUT THEIR DIFFERENCE'S
BEHIND THEM AND MOVE FORWARD... IN FACT I
WOULD SUGGEST THAT YOU AND I JOIN FORWARD."



WHAT?

"MICHAEL, IN TWO YEARS, AMERICA'S INTERNATIONAL
INTERPERSONAL WILL BE YOUR LEGITIMATE. I'M
DOING THIS FOR MY DAUGHTER, FINALLY, BUT ALSO
BECAUSE THERE IS NO LONGER A NEED TO HAVE
LOVED THE OLD WAY."



ENTERTAINERS THAT
BROKE YEARS AGO AS
MONEY-LAUNDERERS
OPERATIONS — FRIENDS OF
VARIOUS KINDS — HAVE
BECOME SLOWLY BUT
PROFITABLY IN THEIR
OWN RIGHT.

WE HAVE AN EVER-EXPANDING INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF HOTELS,
THEATERS AND LOCAL CAMPS... AND IN THE BOOKS AND
MAGAZINE BUSINESSES... THE RECORDING BUSINESS... WE STILL
TEND TO THE NEEDS OF THE CONSUMER FOR ENTERTAINMENT
AND AMUSEMENT...



YOU'RE JUST PHASING OUT
ENTERTAINMENT
AND RELAXATION — AGAIN —
LIKE PRODUCTIONS, ILLUMINATING
GAMBLING AND NARCOTICS.

YES, THAT WAS MY BUSINESS
STILL. AFTER ALL, MY NAME
IS THERE AND LAST TRAIL

AND THERE'S NO
RESPONSE IN
THE MARKET

COME, BUT I HAVE
THE BEST SUPPORT
OF MY SECOND-IN-
COMMAND MY NEPHEW
JOHN... DOWNS
IS A FINE, BRILLIANT
BOY.





I HESITATED MY ANSWER THE FIRST DAY I WONDER HOW I THREW MYSELF INTO MY WORK. ANYONE WHOSE IN ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS PD BEEN PUTTING OFF...



EVERYONE'S GONE BUT YOU AND ME - HIS TREE -

GO ON HOME, EFFIE - I'LL LOOK UP.



I HESITATED MY ANSWER THE FIRST DAY I WONDER HOW I THREW MYSELF INTO MY WORK. ANYONE WHOSE IN ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS PD BEEN PUTTING OFF...



WILL YOU BE MARRIED ME TO STAY LATE, MR. BERNARD Y.



NO DURING THESE ARE SOME MATTERS I SHOULD TEND TO MYSELF.



SHOWING THE BEST OF US AND ABOUT JUMP DOWNCASE.



OH! BERNARD... COME IN, PLEASE!





I HEARD YOU HAD A LITTLE JOSEPHINE TODAY ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

YES, IM FINE - MY DIGNITY IS A LITTLE SHAKEN - THAT'S ALL -



I TOLD YOU THAT BITCH WAS DANGEROUS - SHE HAS TOO MUCH HIGH-LEVEL POWER TO WORK FOR THE AGENTS -



SUCH MANIPULATION, I WOULD NOT HAVE SUFFERED WITHOUT ADDITIONAL RESTRAINTS, AT ONE TIME ...



THINGS HAVE CHANGED, WE'RE A POWERFUL NEW COMPANY NOW, GOTTA RUN THE STORES - AND OUR NAME ...

YOU'RE RIGHT, DOMINE -



AND THERE'S LISA TO CONSIDER.



I'LL HAVE THE PAPERS ON THE ATLANTIC CITY EXPANSION TOMORROW MORNING - NIGHT, AGENT 81.

GOOD NIGHT, DOMINE, THANK YOU.





AMENDING WAS ALWAYS AN AFTERTHOUGHT
THAT HAD NO EFFECT AND HE, HE'VE NEVER
GOTTEN WORKED OUT HIS REGRETMENT FOR
ME -- THE WOMAN WHO TOOK HIS MOTHER'S
PLACE IN HIS FATHER'S MIND.



THAT BOTH OF THEM WERE DEAD AND I
HAD ALL THAT WAS LEFT, DIDN'T HELP.



A MAINTENANCE MAN HAD FOUND DOMINIQUE'S BODY.
HE INVESTIGATED AND FOUND SOMETHING RELEVANT TO THE
AFTERMATH OF SHOOTING.



JESUS. SOMEHOW I
THOUGHT DOMINIQUE MURKIN
WOULD GO ON FOREVER...

AM I YOUR PRIME SUSPECT?
I HAD A HELL OF A MESSING
WITH HER... NOT TO MENTION
PUNCHING HER LIGHTS OUT
YESTERDAY.



WE KNOW ALL ABOUT
THAT LITTLE INCIDENT. SHE
WAS KILLED IN HER OFFICE.
WHERE YOU FUGHT?



WE DIDN'T "FIGHT."
I ASSAULTED HER. ESTIMATED
TIME OF DEATH?



SEVEN-TWENTY
T.M. YOU HAVE
AN ALIBI?



NO.

COME DOWN TODAY,
AT YOUR CONVENIENCE.
WE'LL NEED A
STATEMENT.

YOU'LL
GET
ONE.



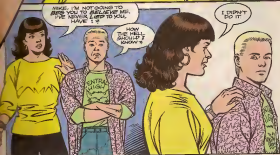
WELL?

WELL,
WHAT?



SHUT
YOU?





VISITATION TO MY LAST RESPECTS TO
DOMINIQUE AUBREY WAS AT A
MUSLIM BURIAL HOME THE
NEXT AFTERNOON.













WHAT WAS THAT ALL ABOUT?

WE WERE MAKING OUR
PEACE, THAT'S ALL.

"SOMETHING YOU AND GAIL
REALLY DON'T WANT TO GET
MIXED UP IN, SOMETHING."



YES, BUT — HOW
HAVE YOU BEEN?

REMARKABLE
ALBERTA, IN
PROPORTION.

DON BROWN IS ALWAYS THERE FOR ME
TO LEAD A HAND — LITERALLY IN ONE
CASE, THANKS TO THE ALBERTA.

GOLDEN
LIFE
FUN!



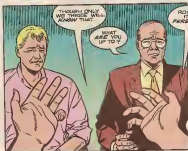
IS IT POSSIBLE
YOU WENT
TO...

YES, IN MY
OFFICE,
SOMETHING.

ROGER BROWNMENT WAS
MY HUSBAND'S MOTHER,
ON THE POLICE, AND
LATER IN BUSINESS.
HE'S LOST A FRIEND —
AND MUCH MORE —
TO THE ALBERTA.

YOU
KNOW
IT?

I'M ACCEPTING THE JOB
AS CHIEF OF SECURITY OF
ALBERTA ENTERPRISES.









"YOU WANT TO LOOK RESPONSIBLE? THINK OF THE FUTURE IF YOU CAN SETTLE BY HAVING AN AGENCY!"



"YOU AND I BOTH KNOW THAT YOUR AUNT WAS KILLED BY SOMEBODY ON THE BEACH OF A.C.T. —"

"YOU'LL FIND MY AUNT'S COLLAR!"



"AS HEAD OF SECURITY, IT WOULD BE MY TOP PRIORITY."



"WHY DO YOU WANT THIS JOB SO BADLY? WHY DO YOU CARE WHO KILLED DOUGLAS AUBURN?"



"IN A POINT OF FACT, I NEED TO CLEAR MY NAME FOR THE SAKE OF THIS INVESTIGATION, INC."



"THEN YOU WOULDN'T WANT OUR AGENCY DOWN?"

"BUT, YOU'RE A CLAY. THINK OF A SECURITY JOB OF THIS SIZE WOULD OPEN NEW DOORS FOR US... WE COULD DO ANYTHING."



"YOU'VE GOT A GOOD HEAD FOR BUSINESS, MR. TROTT. I LIKE THAT. YOU'RE RIGHT."

"I'LL just make a call..."



MR. PHILLIPS IS EXPECTING YOU...



THERE IS NOUSE OFFICE NOW. BUT I'D LIKE A FEW MINUTES TO CLIP OUT MY DICK. IS THAT ASKING TOO MUCH?



HELLO, DARNEY. IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME--

I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT ME. I'M OUTA HERE... LET'S NOT MAKE A DUMB SCENE OUT OF IT...



TAKE IT EASY, DARNEY-- AND PUT THAT STUFF DOWN. YOU'RE GOIN' BEING LATE-- YOU WANT TO?



YOU WERE A GOOD COP, DARNEY. YOU SAVED MY ALIBI-- LIVED A COUPLE YEARS. I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN THAT.



YOUR WIFE'S NEVER WORKED
OR, FRAK! HE, THE CUTTING
THE FORDS, I TAKE THE JOB.
HE SAID TO GO ON OVER TO
THE AGENCY.



HAD
YOU?



I HAVE A FAMILY
MR. TROTT. FIVE KIDS,
AND THEY ALL WANT
COLLEGE EDUCATIONS.
THE LAST OF 'EM IS
AT STATE RIGHT
NOW.

I'M NOT A
Hired GUY --
JUST A SECURITY
CHIEF.
ANYWAY, I
WANT.



WELL, YOU'RE NOT
SECURITY CHIEF, BUT
YOU'RE ASSISTANT CHIEF
OF SECURITY. IF YOU
WANT IT.

COULD
JUST GIVE ME?



I JUST ASKED YOU
YOUR TITLE IS DIFFERENT
NOW, BUT YOUR JOB
DESCRIPTION REMAINS
THE SAME. YOU'LL JUST
ADAPT TO IT...
AT LEAST
NOMINALLY.

NOMINALLY?

THE DAY-TO-DAY BUSINESS OF SECURITY
IS GOING TO REMAIN THE SAME... I'LL
HAVE SOME SUGGESTIONS, MAKE
SOME CHANGES -- BUT PEOPLE
IMPLEMENT THEM.

KEEP YOUR
OFFICE. THERE'S
A SMALL SPACED
DOWN THE HALL I'M
APPROXIMATING.



IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG TO GET UP AND RUNNING. ALL I WANTED WAS A SECRETARY AND A COMPUTER AND THE HELP OF SEVERAL MILLION. I'D MADE IT CLEAR TO HIM THAT MY FIRST CHOICE OF BUSINESS WAS FINANCIAL HIS LATE BROTHER'S FOLLIES.

HERE THEY ARE, MR. TRINE. EVERYBODY KNOWING EMPLOYERS WHO WORKED IN CORPORATE LIA AND WAS DISMISSED — OR QUIT UNDER PRESSURE WITHIN THE PAST TWO YEARS.

THANK YOU, YOU KNOW. I'VE SELECTED YOUR SECURITY SET-UP. BUREAU.

I HEARD YOU THINK IT "SUCCES."

HYPERTHOLE
ACTUALLY IT'S NOT BAD... I GOT IN WITH A SHOT ON ME, BUT SIGHT OF AIRPORT-STYLE METAL DETECTORS AND A DATE-OF-BIRTH ATTENDANCE THERE'S NO PRESENTING THAT.

FURTHERMORE, AFTER-HOURS SECURITY CARDS ARE NEEDED TO TAKE ELEVATORS, USE ELEVATORS, AND TO UNLOCK CERTAIN DOORS — BOTH OF WHICH WOULD HAVE BEEN NECESSARY TO GAIN ACCESS TO DOWNLOADED.

WE ALL KNOW IT'S AN EASY JOB. THE CORP HAS TO — WON'T TAKE YOUR FRIEND BRAD WALKS LONG TO PICK UP ON THIS TRAIL, EITHER...

WELL, COOPERATE WITH HIM — BUT SLOWLY. HE'S GOING TO BE OUT IN THE FIELD QUESTIONING OTHER EMPLOYERS...



"TO SEE IF ANY OF 'EM
HAVE A HILL-SIZE
GRUDGE ..."

I WISHED 'CAUSE I
DON'T LIKE THE
MENTALITY OF MEDIA
ENTREPRENEURS,
SPECIFICALLY DONALD
MURKIN, WHO IS A
FARTER FROM HELL
FOR AS I'M CONCERNED
--A FORTY-TWO--



... SNEAK. DONALD
HAS HIS OWN OFFICE
SUBSIDY. FOR COIN
OUT LOUD. TALK RECORD
ALL TELEPHONE
CONVERSATIONS.
ALL OFFICE MEETINGS.
PERSONAL AND INFORMAL.
A REGULAR NEWS-AGE
ANYWAY. WHEN I
HEARD ABOUT THIS...



... I BUT IMMEDIATELY.
BY PROUDLY RELEASE
SOMETHING TO ME. MY
INTEREST MEANS SOME-
THING TO ME TOO. AND
THERE WAS SEXUAL
PREFERENCE TOO. MY NAME I
SUSPECT DONALD MAY BE ...



... BIPHENYL. AND IN
THAT CASE OF AIDS.
I CAN'T BE TOO CAREFUL.
OH. I COULD HAVE FOLLOWS
AGAINST HIM. BUT
BEING ALL THAT GLAM
AND OTHER. MEDIA
ENTREPRENEURS IS SPECIAL ...



... THE MORE. FINALLY.
THE GUY GOT TO ME.
FINALLY. NOTHING I
DID PERSONALLY HAD
ANY CONNECTION WITH
ANYTHING UNLAWFULLY
ILLEGAL. BUT I STILL
HAD A SENSE OF DONALD
SOMETHING WRONG.
SOMETHING ...



... JEWEL. ALL THIS
TALK OF MOVING INTO
STRICTLY LEGITIMATE
CONCERN IS BULLSHIT.
DONALD'S MAY HAVE
BEEN SINCERE. BUT
"DON DONALD" ... THAT'S
WHAT THE MORE CONTROVERSY
CALLS HIM. YOU KNOW ...
I THINK I'LL COME
TO A FIVE-YEAR-OLD.



THEY'RE ALL BEEN FRANK WITH ME, THE FORMER
MANAGER EMPLOYED. BUT THEN I HADN'T
MENTIONED I WAS WORKING FOR THE
REPTILES. THEY ALL KNEW WHO I WAS, AND
FOUNDED I WAS TRYING TO CLEAR MYSELF.

BUT I HADN'T TURNED UP ANY GOOD
SUSPECTS. NOBODY SEEMED TO
HAVE A LARGE ENOUGH BATE-ON
TO REAP POSSIBLE MURDER TOGETHER
LATELY AT JUST REWARD.

A GENTLEMAN FROM THE POLICE
IS HERE...

DO I HAVE TO GET A COURT
ORDER TO GET THE NAME? I'M
AFRAID I'VE BEEN ASKED FOR
THE DISGRACED FORMER EMPLOYED
LIST. IT'S RIGHT HERE...

THE DISGRACED FORMER EMPLOYED
LIST. IT'S RIGHT HERE...

OH.
THANKS, AGENT...

WHAT IS IT, WILL
YOU BE UP TO 7
WORKING FOR THE
REPTILES? YES
IS NOT...

I'M OFFICIALLY
HOLDING. DATE,
DON'T YOU HAVE
"BETHSOMETHING"?

NO, LIKE
THATY-GHARRS-
SOMETHING IN YOUR
CASE. I DON'T
LIKE THIS.

I DON'T EXPECT YOU
TO. WHAT CAN YOU
TELL ME ABOUT
DON DONNIE?



HOW
COULD
THAT BE?

DO YOU BELIEVE HE WOULD
FORGET ABOUT HIS DESIRE TO
PHASE OUT ILLEGAL
ACTIVITIES?



HELL, NO.
I THINK HE'S
A BASTARD.
WHY?

HE
AINT FELT
HE WAS AN
ALLY.



MAYBE SHE LOVED HIM.
THEY SAY HE WAS LIKE A BOMB TO
HER... BUT MAYBE SHEY FEELING
ONLY RAN IN ONE DIRECTION.

MICHELLE...
CAREFUL...



THAT'S RIGHT, BARNEY—
THE ENTIRE SECURITY
STAFF, GAVE TOO A
SKELETON CREW ON DUTY.
AND I WANT AN ADDRESS
VIDEO TAPED FOR THEM
TO SEE.



WHAT'S
THIS
ABOUT?

WHO THE HELL KNOWS IF
THIS PLACE IS GOING CRAZY—
HEARD THAT THUNDER-HARTY
DROVE TO HEAD UP
SECURITY?

HEH WORTH FOR
HER? DAMN.
SHE KILLED
THOSE GOOD
FOLK OF
MINE!

CORPORATE
AMERICA IS
GROWING
MAN...

I THINK YOU ALL KNOW WHO I AM. AND I'M SURE YOU KNOW THAT, FOR THE PAST SEVERAL DAYS, I'VE BEEN YOUR NEW CHIEF OF SECURITY. YOU'RE WELCOME. I'M SURE WHAT CHANGES WILL BE MADE DOWN...

BUT I'M STILL STRONGER THE SECURITY OUTLIER HERE, AND AM NOT READY TO INSTITUTE ANY MAJOR ALTERATIONS IN THE SISTER CLO... AND YOU WILL CONTINUE TO REPORT TO, AND DEAL WITH, MR. RULLING AS IN THE PAST.

I DO WANT TO ANNOUNCE THAT EVERYONE IN THIS BUILDING — BEGINNING WITH THE PEOPLE IN THIS ROOM — WILL BE TAKING POLYGRAPHIC TESTS REGARDING THE MURDER OF DOMINIQUE MURPHY.

ARE THESE TESTS VOLUNTARY? WE GOT CERTAIN RESULTS, YOU KNOW?

YES!

"WHY OF COURSE THESE TESTS ARE VOLUNTARY."

YOU SEE, I'M PERSONALLY INTERESTED IN FINDING OUT WHO DOESN'T WANT TO TAKE A LIE-DETECTION TEST.

IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR MY
"PUP" TEAM TO GET RESULTS...

YOU WANTED
TO FLUSH OUT THE
QUALITY PARTIES
WITH YOUR
LIE-DETECTION
TRICKS! —

IT'S NO
PARADE
BUTNEY.

WELL... YOU MAY NOT HAVE
TO BOOTHER GOING THROUGH
WITH IT. I'VE BEEN
APPROACHED BY AN M.I.
SABOTEUR WHO WANTS
TO JOINT WITH YOU.
ONE - ONE - ONE.

FOR THE
PURPOSE OF
CONFESSING?

OR POINTING A
FINGER, EITHER WAY.
YOUR TACTIC
INVADED...

YOU'VE BROUGHT A
SUBJECT... OR AT
LEAST AN ANSWER...
OUT INTO THE
OPEN.

WELL, BUTNEY SAID: "THEY STAYED OUT
SIDE THE GYM — THE QUALITY
PARTIES A MIGHTY ASSET. JUST YOU
AND ME, IN THE UNDERGROUND
PERSONAL CHARGE."

BUTNEY!
YOU KNOW I'M
SUPPOSED TO BE
HERE ALONE.

YES — BUT I'M AFRAID OF
A TRAP. I'D
BETTER BACK
YOU UP —

"PUP-TEAM"
LIVES —



YOU THINK
THAT I AM
NECESSARY?

UNFORTUNATELY,
YES.



YOU SEE, FOR THE
SAFE SIDE, I HAD WANTED
TO MEET WITH YOU.



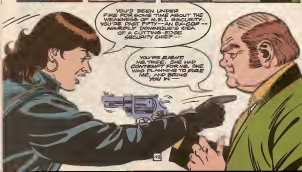
I
KNOW.



YOU
KNOW?

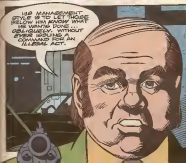


WELL — I SUSPECTED, IN SOME SITUATIONS
YOU MIGHT KNOW. I HOPED I WAS
WRONG IN THAT ONE — BUT I WAS RIGHT.



YOU'D BEEN UNDER
FIRE FOR SOME TIME ABOUT THE
WEAKNESS OF M.I. 1. ABOUT
YOU'RE JUST FIFTY — AN EX-GO-
— A BOLD, DOWNRIGHT IDEA
OF A CUTTING-EDGE
SECURITY GROUP.

YOU'RE ABOUT
TO TRY. SHE HAD
CONSPIRED FOR ME. SHE
WAS PLANNING TO KILL
ME, AND REUSE
YOU IN —





RIGHT. THAT'S HOW
THESE UPGRADED NOBLE
MONSTEREAS CALLED IN
DON DONNIE'S
ORGANIZATION.

SWEET.

"THEY TAKE IT UPON THEMSELVES TO DO
THESE DONNIE MONSTEREAS WITHOUT
DON DONNIE'S STAMP OF APPROVAL.
I WAS JUST TACKLING A PUNK OUT OF
THEIR YUPPIE HANDBOOK."



WOW
WOLLY
BANDY!



NOW, YOU HELP
AND FROM GETTING
FOUNT OUT.



"I DID YOU
A FAVOR.
— I WOULD
THAT BUNCH
DONNIE'S
ALBERTA.
AND THERE
WOULD'VE
BEEN
PROOF!"



YOU
TINK
SO?

I SURE AS HELL
DO. HELP ME COVER
MY TEACHER.
AND...



"... I'LL HELP YOU BECAUSE
DON DONNIE'S FROM
FROM WITHIN!"



NO.

NO?



NO, YOU'D HAVE TO SHOOT MR. TUCKER FIRST.



BUT IF YOU DO, ALL YOUR RATIONALIZATIONS ABOUT KILLING DOWNHILL -- HOW IT WAS JUSTIFIED BECAUSE SHE WAS EVIL, AND SHE DESERVED EXECUTION A THOUSAND TIMES OVER -- ARE BULLSHIT.

DON'T... DUFFY...



NO AND SHOOT ME IF YOU CAN. I'LL FACE YOU AFTERWARDS.







PLEASE
YOU!

I NEVER
TOLD HIM TO
OBTAIN BARNEY
PHILLIPS.

YOU JUST LET HIM KNOW "IN
SO MANY WORDS." THE SAME
WAY YOU SENT BARNEY TOWARD
YOUR AUNT LIKE A SHOT
ARROW?



BARNEY OVERSTEPS
THE BOUNDS. HE WAS
NOT FOLLOWING MY WISHES
WHEN HE GOT RID OF
MY AUNT.



THAT'S WHY MY
AUNT GOT RID OF
BARNEY — OR SO
I CAN ONLY
SUSPECT.

CAREFUL,
THE TAPES ARE
RUNNING —



TWO HAD YOU OVER-REACTED
AND JUST FROD BARNEY?
OCCASION SAID, "HE WAS
LEFT TRYING TO BE
YOUR PROTECTOR."



AND YOU MESSAGE?
YOU'VE REBARRED I
"NOT RID OF" YOUR FLUNKY?
HE'S ANOTHER LEAD AND
TIED UP.

YOU'RE A REAL
PECK OF WORK,
DORIS — A SASSY
WITH AN M. B. A. —
BUT YOU LET
OTHERS DO YOUR
BITING FOR YOU.



IT WONDER WHY
DON'T IT? MY
AUNT IS DEAD, BUT
HOWEVER CLEARLY
OF THE MURDER
AND THE MURDER
IS THAT THAT'S
MY LITTLE
PARENT TO YOU.
A JOB FOR...



ILL TELL YOU WHAT I TOLD YOUR AUNT:
I DO MY OWN KILLING, THANK YOU.
YOU'VE JUST COME TO THE HEAD OF MY
PERSONAL. DON'T LET YOUR FANNISHED
LITTLE MURDER...



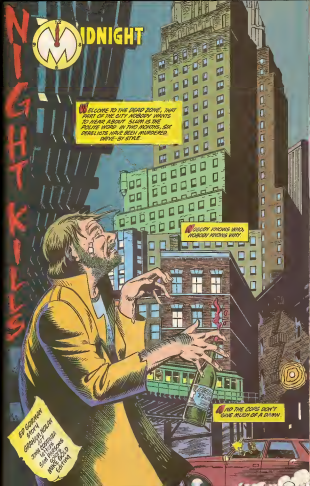
"VIOLENCE AND DEATH ARE ABSTRACTS TO
YOU, UP HERE, IN YOUR GLASS TOWER.
BUT ONE OF THOSE DAYS HAS COME TO TEAR
YOU WHAT VIOLENCE AND DEATH ARE ALL
ABOUT — OF COURSE AND PERSONAL."



MOST OF MY
END LOVING SPEAK TO
ME MORE ABSTRACTLY
THAN THAT MURDER...

OH REALLY?
WELL, HERE'S MY
PERSONAL...





NIGHT KILLS



MIDNIGHT

WELCOME TO THE DEAD ZONE, THAT PART OF THE CITY NOBODY WANTS TO HEAR ABOUT. BLAM IS THE POLICE WORD. IN THIS DISTRICT, SIX CRIMINALS HAVE BEEN MURDERED DRIVE-BY STYLE.

WHOODY FINDS WHO, WHOODY FINDS WHO.

YET THE COPS DON'T GIVE A SHIT OF A DAMN.

FOR CRIMINALS
STAY
CRIMINALS STAY
ONE CRIMINAL
STAY
STAY
STAY
STAY
STAY

CLIFF KETTER COULDN'T HAVE
ANY FRIENDS. FRIENDS DON'T
KIDNAP HIM. SO SUPPOSE HIS
FRIENDS ARE JUST SO READY
ROADS HIM A LITTLE CRAFT



I'M GONNA AMP THE
FREAKIN' GREN WHO DID
THIS TO YOU, MIKE. I
PROMISE



RIGHT DOWN
THE STREET. HE'S
DEAD. HURRY.

IF YOU DON'T HURRY I'M
TAKIN' A FREAKIN' BREAK
HE AIN'T COMIN'
NOWHERE

DOUGLAS
FUCKING
MURDER.



FRIEND OF MINE WAS
MURDERED TONIGHT, I
WANT SEE HE GETS
A DECENT BURIAL.

FOR PEOPLE WHO DON'T
HAVE AN ACCOUNT WITH
US, WE RESERVE A
SPECIAL CASH
DEPOSIT.

HE'S DEAD
AND ACCORDY
GIVES A
DOWN



CLIFF WALKS THROUGH THE NIGHT, LISTENING
TO THE VOICES OF THE Ghetto

HE'S DEAD, HE
CLIFFIE, MY
HE'S LUCKY
THE BEST OF

AIN'T NOBODY YOU
CAN DO BUT GET
THE BOTTLE BACK
AN BUY YOURSELF A
LITTLE PERCE.

Nobody
Gonna
HELP YOU
Nobody

MAN NAMED
MURDERER'S YOUR
ONLY HOME, CLIFF





WHO'S MIDNIGHT?



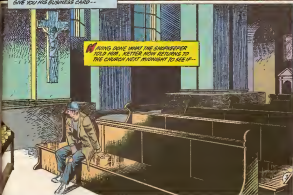
I AM NOT SURE. MAYBE HE DOESN'T EVEN EXIST! BUT I ALWAYS HEAR THESE STORIES... ALL I KNOW IS YOU GO TO SEE MICHAEL'S...

... AND YOU LIGHT THE ONLY WISDOM CANDLE AND THEN -- ACCORDING TO WHAT I HEARD --



^ -- THE FOLLOWING MIDNIGHT, HE'LL ARRIVE. THEY SAY HE NEVER FAILS. IF HE AGREES TO HELP, HE'LL JUST GIVE YOU HIS BUSINESS CARD --

HAVING DONE WHAT THE CARPENTER TOLD HIM, KESTER NOW RETURNS TO THE CHURCH NEXT MIDNIGHT TO SEE IF --





YOU
REALLY
DO
EXIST.



FOR THE NEXT TWENTY MINUTES, CLIFF TALKS AND ARGUMENTS LOUDLY, NEVER SAYING A WORD

YOU REALLY
DON'T TALK,
HUH?

CAN YOU HELP
ME, MIDNIGHT?
I WANNA SEE
MYNE'S KILLER
GET CAUGHT.

WILL YA
HELP ME,
PLEASE?



AS ALWAYS, IN DORLING, MIDNIGHT SPENDS THE NEXT THREE HOURS IN THE METRO HANGING FOR THE SIGN OF BEING BY JOLLY



BUT HE FINDS NOTHING UNTIL LATE ON THE THIRD NIGHT...



KILLED ME? GUMP?...
OUR FATHER WHO
ART IN...

WHY
SOMEBODY
WANNA KILL
ME, MAN?

OUR FATHER WHO
ART IN... HELL, MAN,
IT GETTIN' SO
DARK...

IT'S TOO LATE
TO HELP THIS
OLD MAN,
BUT NOT TOO
LATE TO HELP
OTHERS.



LATER



HOW TO DO BEFORE SLEEP REMAINS.



AS HADWORTH TALKED, THE MYSTERIOUS
GENTLEMAN CONSIDERED WHAT HE'D
LEARNED.



THE LICENSE PLATE WAS TAKEN
STOLEN FROM A DIFFERENT CAR
AND PUT ON THE JUNKER.



BUT THE WHOLE SCENE A MOST
CURIOUS DISCOVERY.





JEN JENNINGS, THE COMMUNITY IS AT THE
OF HIM, AN INVESTMENT BANKER WHO
MADE HIS FIRST MILLION BEFORE AGE
THIRTY

ENTER THAT EVENING...





WELL IN MIGHT, JENNIFER. EACH OF US
AGREED TO DISGUISE OURSELVES AND GO DOWN
TO HONKLEWELL AND KILL A DELEGATE. THAT'S
YOUR INSTRUCTION AND THE DELEGATE'S
BRONKHORST GLENN. NOW EITHER DO IT OR KILL THE
NEXT IN THE LINE.



WELL'S BODY IS READY TO BRING IN HELP



LISTEN,
SEND THE
OTHERS
IN--



WE DO



BRIT, SEND THE CHOPPER TO
THE ROOF IN FIVE MINUTES!



YOU DID JUST WHAT I
TELL YOU. YOU ~~GOOD~~
GOOD, BRIT!





WITH MORRELL'S
DAILY JOURNAL
EXACTLY IMPROVE
TODAY!!

COULDN'T
HAPPEN TO
A NICER
GUY!

SO LONG,
SUCKER.

BYRONIAN
SLEAZEBALL

SPAT

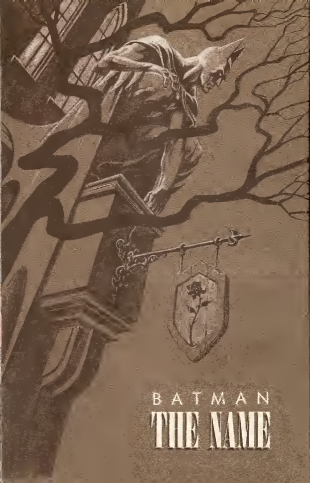
BECAUSE IF YOU FOLKS
DON'T MIND, I'LL GET
ME SOME NEW
FOOTWEAR

THE DEATH OF CLYDE KESTER'S MURDER
WAS BEING REVISITED. HIS FATHER WAS
DOING NEW DANCES IN THE BATHROOM.



BUT NOW HE'S MORE
CONCERNED THAN EVER
ABOUT THE MAN WHO
HELPED HIM

THE LONG, SILENT
WALK AROUND ONLY
HAS ANSWERS.



BATMAN
THE NAME

If they had attacked him, or if he had been wearing the mask and costume, he would have had no problem dealing with the three hulks who leapt at him and Alfred from the



hushes. As it was, he had already begun the moves that would look like stumblings and would actually be efficient counterattacks. But he was not the target. Alfred was. And the instant it took him to adjust his stance was an instant he didn't have. He was able to snap the first attacker's hammer with a knife-hand strike and punch the second with a heel to the solar plexus, but the third laid a blackcap over his left ear, and then did it a second time, and a third and fourth. Realizing that he could not maintain consciousness—that he had lost—Bruce relaxed, let himself crumple to the grass, slide into unconsciousness and was himself another, possibly crippling, blow to the head.

He awoke. His internal clock told him he had been unconscious exactly 53 seconds. He heard an engine. A car was starting behind the house. He ran. But it was too late. He could see shape of the vehicle leaving the minor grounds by the rear gate, moving along the road which led to the freeway. He glanced at the ground, visible in the glow from one of the spotlights attached to a rear porch. The asphalt, evenly dusted with snow, seemed to offer no clues.

He did a quick personal inventory: nothing broken, nothing looted and the damage to his skull amounted to no more than the slightest of concussions. His head hurt, but that was no problem, as he was punching the security code into the rearward electronic locking system and laying his handprint onto the sensor plate, he was already focusing into the past, getting inside it and occupying the scene so it would have nothing to cling to.

In the foyer, he checked the doors connected relatives. No one had actually entered the house. His occupants had simply waited in the bushes. Sometimes the crude methods worked best, precisely because they were crude. He went to the

grandfather clock, set the hands at 10:47—the time his parents had been slain, those many years past—pulled the counter's eight chain and stepped back to allow the old clock to swing aside, revealing the hidden doorway and the long slope of stone steps down to the cave.

It was chilly and damp, as always, and that was good. The business he did down here, in the remote cavern, was cold and ugly, and the environment helped him to remember that. He went past the cyclotron to the communications bank, spoke a telephone number into a microphone and waited a while a connection was made.

A voice from the speaker. "Carverton residence?"

"Hi, there. It's me—Bruce Wayne. I was at the reception tonight."

"Of course, sir. I remember."

"Jenkins' is it Jenkins I'm speaking to?"

"Jacobs, sir."

"Yes. The chairman?"

"Secretary, sir."

"Naturally. After all, I didn't call the garage, did I? Well, Jacobs, I wonder if I might speak with your boss. This would be Dr. Anders Carverton, if you happen to have two bosses."

"I'm afraid Dr. Carverton has been put his rest, Mr. Wayne."

"My, my, he's dedicated. Now let me see if I remember — He's going to figure out the code of the Green Crystal—"

"The Black Rose, sir."

"Yes, yes, of course. He's going to decode this old document and he won't succeed but done. That is, Jacobs?"

"Close, sir. He won't leave the study until he has the documents deciphered. If he completes the task within 72 hours, a benefactor will donate four million dollars to Dr. Carverton's favorite charity."

"Thank all very well, Jacobs, but it is vitally important that I speak to him."

"Impossible, sir."

"Can't you even put a phone call through?"

"The study telephone has been removed."

"Well through the door?"

"Soundproof."

"I suppose a carrier pigeon is out of the question."



Jacob forced a shackle.

"Tell me, does Dr. Cavdren do this sort of thing often?"

"I wouldn't know, sir. I've been in his employ less than a month. Is that all, Mr. Wayne?"

"Well, it *has* to be, I suppose."

Wayne snapped his fingers and the corner man broke. For a moment, he stood staring at the shadowed roof of the eaves and hearing to the first clanking of the bars who lived there. It was time to act—and it was time to stop being Bruce Wayne.

He shed his randa. He pulled on the right, the boom, the slow-right turn. He buckled the belt. He considered the ropes hanging in a niche in the cover wall. He didn't know yet when noon he would be taking before morning, and so he could not decide if he should choose the heavy leather rope with the kevlar panels for maximum protection or the lightweight nylon cord for maximum movement. When in doubt, opt for mobility. He put on the nylon. Finally, and most important of all, the mask. He held it in front of his face; he nearly a minute, staring at the empty symbol—a mask, he realized—his own, intensely private preparation for the transformation—

With the mask in place, there was no Bruce Wayne. The handsome, unfocused, fussy and worn-out-eyed millionaire suddenly and utterly ceased to be. In his place, there was—an entity for which no name existed, really. But because it had to be called something, it was called the Batman.

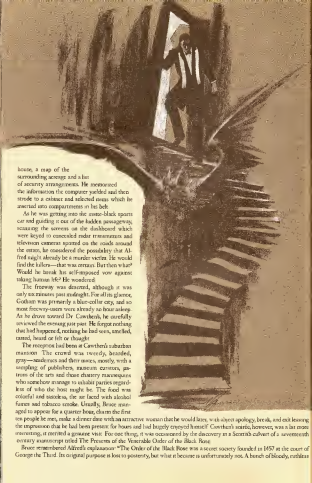
Now it was raining outside the mansion to the bumble where the attackers had waited, playing a powerful flashlight over the ground, dropping

bits of gravel into a plastic evidence bag, reading the signs, the crushed grass, the tracks in the snow, the deep soil. Three of them. Waited less than fifteen minutes. Two were large men, over two hundred pounds, over six feet tall, and the third was smaller—five-foot, one sixty. He knew all that, of course; he had seen the attack. But he would not assume his knowledge was accurate until it was confirmed.

Back in the cave, he dropped the plastic bag onto a lab table. He could run scans and analyses, and almost certainly, they would provide information, but they would take time and that made them a last resort. He might not have time.

He went to the work station of the computer bank and accessed the Cavdren file. He was particularly interested in the floor plan of Cavdren's



A man in a dark suit and white shirt is running through a dark, tunnel-like passage. He is looking back over his shoulder with a determined expression. The passage is dimly lit, with light coming from an opening ahead of him. To the right, a set of stairs leads down into the darkness. The overall atmosphere is one of mystery and suspense.

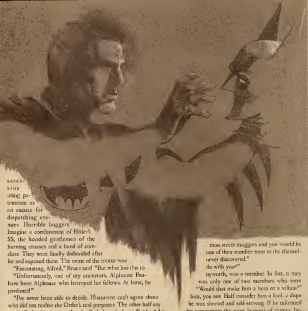
house, a map of the surrounding acreage and a list of security arrangements. He monitored the information the computer yielded and then strode to a cabinet and selected items which he inserted into compartments in his belt.

As he was getting into the matte-black sports car and guiding it out of the hidden passageway, scanning the screens on the dashboard which were keyed to concealed radar transmitters and television cameras spaced on the roads around the estate, he considered the possibility that Alfred might already be a murder victim. He would find the killers—that was certain. But then what? Would he break his self-imposed vow against taking human life? He wondered.

The freeway was deserted, although it was only six minutes past midnight. For all its glories, Gotham was primarily a blue-collar city, and so most freeway-users were already asleep. As he drove toward Dr. Cawthorne, he carefully reviewed the evening past. He forgot nothing that had happened, nothing he had seen, smelled, tasted, heard or felt or thought.

The reception had been at Cawthorne's suburban mansion. The crowd was twenty, bearded, gray—academics and their wives, mostly, with a sampling of publishers, museum curators, patrons of the arts and those chaste matronly magnates who somehow manage to inhibit parties regardless of who the host might be. The food was colorful and tasteless, the air laced with alcohol fumes and tobacco smoke. Usually, Bruce managed to appear for a quarter hour, claim the first ten people he met, make a dinner date with an attractive woman that he would later, with apologetic brevity, break, and exit leaving the impression that he had been present for hours and had hugely enjoyed himself. Cawthorne's soirée, however, was a far more interesting, it merited a genuine visit. For one thing, it was accompanied by the discovery in a Scottish cabinet of a seventeenth-century manuscript titled *The Precepts of the Venerable Order of the Black Rose*.

Bruce remembered Alfred's explanation: "The Order of the Black Rose was a secret society founded in 1457 in the court of George the Third. Its original purpose is lost to posterity, but what it became is unfortunately not. A bunch of bloody, ruthless



...and
...and
...using po-
...tention as
...an excuse for
...dispatching ene-
...mies. Horrible buggers."
Imagine a combination of Hitler's

SS, the hooded gentlemen of the
herring crosses and a band of some-
dear. They were finally disbanded after
he and exposed them. The name of the traitor was

"Fascinating, Alfred," Bruce said. "But what has this to
do with you?"
"Unfortunately, one of my ancestors, Alphonse Pea-
have been Alphonse who betrayed his fellows. At least, he
perished."

"I've never been able to decide. Historians can't agree about
who did not realize the Order's real purposes. The other half say
on the Order, he put an end to the Order's wickedness. But he did it
saying his violent ends, wanting his hands on the gallows. In his
ed the Order's work. Which is the worse—ignorance or malice? In any event, it was a terrible business."

"So you're mixed in the ... what is the purpose of this revelation?"

"I suspect we will learn that when we get those, Master Bruce."

They did. Anders saw that was true, and that and pale almost to transparency. His flesh was bleached—
on a cane. When he spoke, he wheezed, and he paused frequently to gulp air.

"Tonight, I am to begin the greatest and final task of my life," he told the group gathered in the opulent
manor.

The murmur of conversation and the sniffs of glassware quieted.

"Your explanation," Alfred whispered to Bruce.

"As many of you know, the Order of the Black Rose communicated in code. Until the discovery, last month,
only fragments of that code survived the ravages of time. Now, however, with the Presents to hand, there is a
sample for me to attempt to decipher it. That I will do. If I succeed, the contents of the Presents will be made fully

well, the mystery will never be solved and my life is a failure."

The old man waved his cane—probably in favor of, though he looked as though he were communicating with his audience
and lunged from the room.

"He's not just blowing smoke," someone in Bruce's office said. "About the mystery never being solved if he catches a
man."

The speaker was short, stout, middle-aged. He was wearing a bright yellow shirt decorated with silk fringe, a string of
pressed jeans and unlamin cowboy boots.



"I had my people research him," the speaker continued. "Strange old duck. Eccentric, eccentric. He knows stuff from a letter that was accidentally discovered a couple of years ago. Never told anyone what it is, never wrote it down. Apparently, it's necessary to understand this code."

"Have we met?" Bruce asked.

"I wish Maxwell had. Randall Maxwell has. And you're Wayne—see your picture in the paper now, and then I'll often thought I could do you some good—image-wise, I mean."

Alfred Pennyworth.

"Nice to meet you, Tim"—Bruce, smiled at Alfred—"is my friend."

"Not friend," Alfred told Maxwell. "Butter I am Master Wayne's butler."

"The other descendants? Well, what are you betting, Pennyworth? Who did it, your ancestor or mine?"

"I reserve my opinion."

"Me, I think old Aldobert Maxwell was the whistle-blower. I had my people research this and thank it. Upstairs Pennyworth seems like a work-sister. 'Speechless type'."

Bruce saw Alfred suffer. *Sm Alfred has family pride. In all these years, I never suspected.*

"Are you a gentleman?" Bruce asked.

"Why do you think that? Oh, the clothes. No, I'm an image consultant. Opened a branch in Tim. Worth a couple of weeks ago and decided I should go native."

"The Texas has between I've met told to Miss Farrell," Alfred said.

"Maybe you're only met the doll ones."

"Or those with taste."

"Listen, you damn—"

Bruce stepped between Alfred and Randall Maxwell. "It's been a pleasure, Mr. Maxwell. I have a young

lady I've promised to meet in the city."

Alfred assumed on driving home—

"Appearances must be maintained," he said when Bruce protested—and so Bruce allowed himself to walk into the leather upholstery of the limousine. For a while, he watched large, fat snowflakes flare in the knob headlights, swerving the quarter. The snow, six or ten feet, however, over in five minutes. As Alfred drove through the crunch huge iron gear, he said, "I suppose the break in the weather means you'll be leaving again—no that a little thing like a storm ever inhibits your nocturnal activity."

"Not tonight, Alfred. I really haven't had much sleep in the past four days—"

"Ah, yes. The contraptions with the Penguin."

"Yes. And since our friend Mr. Cobblepot is unavailable in the Gotham House of Detention, I think I'll go to myself's night off. Maybe read a couple of books and turn in early."

Bad prophecy. Now, three hours later, he was returning to Gotham's with only 53 seconds' rest. He realized that Alfred's abduction might have nothing to do with Cobblepot, but that





was silently and, lacking anywhere else to begin, he would question the old scholar. He perched the car in the shadows alongside the high stone wall that surrounded Caverton's estate, set on alarm, and, after a moment's concentration, bounded from the top of the car to the top of the wall and over. He landed lightly, his fingers already connecting a thin, aerosol container from his belt. The two German shepherds bounded around the corner of the house. When they were about ten feet away, the Batman pressed the top of the aerosol and the dogs stopped, relaxed, whinpered and collapsed onto the grass. They would be unconscious for approximately two hours.

The Batman glided to the house and looked up at a single rectangle of light high in a row of five stories above the ground. If he tried to reach it from outside, he would have to deal with a battery of bangle alarms, a butler, a chauffeur, a secretary and a hired security guard. Thus he could do with no uncommon effort, but it would take time and that was exactly what he might not have.

He pulled off a glove and hit the customer of the wall with his bare fingers. No problem. He removed his other glove, knicked it with an earring and tucked both under his belt. Then he reached up, hooked his fingers into a space between the stones, and began climbing.

Exactly four minutes later, he was perched on a sill peering through a window into Arthur Caverton's study. Light came from a single circular fluorescent bulb in a reflector above a desk in the center of the room. The old man was hunched over a computer keyboard, his gaze swiveling from a sheet of parchment on the desk to the computer screen. As the Batman watched, he pressed a key and peered intently at the screen for a moment before returning his attention to the parchment.

The window opened easily and the Batman slipped into the room. Caverton's head jerked around and he gasped.

"Please don't be alarmed, Doctor," the Batman said pleasantly. "I won't keep you long."

"Who are you?" the old man rasped.

"Call me the Batman. I'd like to ask you a question, if I may."

"I can't stop you, can I?"

"Then do it quickly and get out."

"I'll probably be dead before the check gets written. Paying the Gotham Brotherhood."

"Who is offering the money?"

"None of your business."

The Batman knelt by an electrical outlet and fingered a length of wire that ran from it to the computer. He looked up at Caverton and smiled. "I understand that when the power to a computer is interrupted, whatever in the machine is lost. Hours of labor sometimes. Is that correct, Doctor?"

"You wouldn't dare."

The Batman tugged at the wire. "I will do anything I want. Absolutely anything."

"No, no," Caverton gasped, and coughed for almost a minute. When he had regained his breath, he said, "It's Halibut. Aaron Halibut."

"Sir Aaron Halibut? The British industrialist?"

"Yes, yes. Now I've given you the name. Get out!"

"In a moment. Why is this translation so important to him?"

"Because the name of the man who betrayed the Order of the Black Rose is in it."

"And do you have any idea what that name might be?"

"One of two. Either Alphonsus Perryworth or Aldibert Maxwellton."

"Why does Halibut care about the name?"

"How the devil should I know?"

"Guess, or—" The Batman curled the wire around his forefinger.

"The Royal Court sent one of Halibut's ancestors to the gallows in the Tower of London. As the noose was being put around his neck, he made his sons swear vengeance. Each succeeding generation of male Halibuts have sworn the vow. I suppose that includes Aaron Halibut."

"So he wants to make good on a promise that's hundreds of years old?"

"I suppose."

The Batman let the wire drop to the floor and smiled. "Doctor, a man's life may be in danger. You've got to delay completing your translation at least a day or two."



"I'm afraid not."

"Someone is paying me."

"Not paying me Society—"

[Signature]



I shouldn't need more than that—less, in fact—”

“I can’t,” Cawthen shouted, the hoarse voice suddenly charged with passion. “I am doing the right, I should already be dead. As my second living lie, I am only able to function because of pain killers.”

Wernau glanced in his eyes. “And, you see, I have spent my life and most of my intelligence studying the Order of the Black Rose. I have allowed it to be the center of my existence. I have never had a wife, children, even any close friends. Oh, I was foolish, I can see that now. But it is too late to change and I never knew I must know who the master was. Can you understand? Can you possibly comprehend what it is to be in the grasp of an all-consuming obsession?”

The Baron put his hand on the old man’s shoulder and said, “Yes.” Then he stepped back and said, “Lee Gove Halbart is a third name.”

“He would not be looked. He is as familiar with the Order as I am.”

“Finally the decoding but will Halbart you haven’t?”

“Time”—Cawthen touched the computer—“makes that impossible. It is connected by telephone to a duplicate machine at Halbart’s possession. He is able to follow my labors as I perform them.”

The Baron pondered. He could put Cawthen to sleep easily enough, but if the scholar was as old as he claimed—and, looking in him, the Baron did not doubt it—even minor violence might be too much. He could destroy the computer. But how would his unseen enemy react? It was a chance he dare not take.

He unwrapped a thin polymer line from around his waist, tied one end to a radiator, and sprang to the window sill.

“I can’t wish you good luck, Doctor. But I expect that.”

He stepped out of the window.

Back in the car, he tapped a number into a cellular telephone and scanned the vast data bank in the baroque. A screen on the dashboard brightened and a small keyboard slid from under it. He typed. Letters began popping onto the screen. Within five minutes he knew that Arnon Halbart had been twice committed to a mental hospital outside London and that there was a history of violent psychosis in his family. Did that mean Halbart was capable of murder? The Baron tapped another telephone number and listened to a buzzing. Then “H’lo.”

“Commissioner, it’s me.”

“As two in the morning, who else would it be?”

“I need information.”

“Go on.”

“A man named Maxwellian may have been kidnapped last night—”

“He was. The call came in an hour ago. Guy was grabbed outside his apartment building at about midnight. Wernau was walking his dog, and the kidnappers pulled up in a dark blue Chevy sedan a minute or two before Maxwellian arrived. A doorman tried to intervene, got shot to death for his trouble.”

“How many questions,” the Baron told herself. “The kidnappers are willing to murder.”

“... dog walker said there were three attackers,” Commissioner James Gordon was saying. “Get away in a dark blue sedan, probably armed. We’re checking. You know anything about this?”

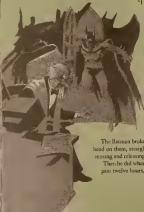
“You might find out where Arnon Halbart is. I’m guessing he’s somewhere near Gotham.”

“Okay, I’ll get someone on it. But why?”

“I have reason to believe Halbart is behind the abduction.”

“Listen, I’ve got to hang—”

The Baron broke the connection. He put his forehead on the steering wheel, rind his head on them, straightened and began breathing deeply. Slowly, systematically, he began relaxing and releasing his muscles. When his body was fully relaxed, his mind had calmed. Then he did what only he knew he did best he thought. Let his memory range over the past twelve hours, reviewed events, considered possible meetings, allowed connections



to form. Part of the answer lay in the best start, of course. No dry gun on the asphalt. Which means the kidnappers had parked behind Wayne Martin only a short time before we were attacked. If they'd been there any longer, their car would have double-dipped the ground and I would have seen its shape in the snow. And the kidnappers' car was stopped in front of Maxwell's building very shortly before he arrived. They must have known when we left the party, when Maxwell left—

He looked up, past the wall, to the highest window in the tower. How can Carver's labors group? Has he finished? Has he found the name?

Such speculation was pointless, a stupid distraction. His own labors was all that was important. Get back in a. Somebody in the party must have informed the kidnappers. But there were at least fifty people present. Who were they? Respected academics, their wives, their lovers, Alfred, Maxwell, Carver himself, me, and—

And the center, a red jacket's driver and car other. No proof that he was Haliburt's man, but that wasn't a court of law. The Batman picked up his phone, tapped a number, waited, recognized the voice that mumbled a sleepy hello and said, "Listen, it's gone sour. No time to explain—the police are on their way. You'd better leave immediately. Go to Haliburt. He'll give you instructions."

"Who are you?" The voice was no longer sleepy.

"Who the bloody hell do you think I am? Get moving."

The Batman dropped the phone. It was pure bluff, and there was a dozen ways it could fail, but it was the only chance he had.

Less than five minutes later, a dark green Volvo sped from Carver's property and turned onto the road a dozen yards from where the Batman waited. The Batman followed, not using his headlights, instead, he polarized the windshield and switched on the infrared beams. It was a short journey. The Volvo stopped near a white Pontiac and a dark blue Chevrolet near a deserted gas station at an intersection four miles off the newly-built freeway. The building was not much more than a shed; the windows were covered with slabs of plywood, an ancient sign hung from one corner and weeds were growing through cracks in the concrete driveway.

Pretty creepy house for a millionaire madman.

His quarry had entered the house through a side door. Normally, the Batman would have recognized the area, planned several alternative attacks, but it would take the man only seconds to discover that he had been duped, seconds more to recover, and then—

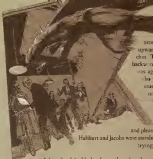
I may already be too late. Carver may have found his answer while I was driving here.

Again, he willed himself to relax. Worse, he would be more likely to make a mistake. He launched himself at the door.

It was still splintering as he hit the floor inside and rolled, and as he did, he registered the scene: Five men were seated around a card table littered with ashtrays and bombs (his three smokers and the two who had grabbed Maxwell here); a fat man in a brown suit (surely Haliburt) sitting at a computer monitor which sat atop a old hansom cart; and, on the floor in a corner, bound hand and foot, Alfred and Maxwell (alive). And, standing next to Haliburt, a thin man in pajama bottoms, a trench coat and house slippers (Jacobs, the secretary who, when he had told Bruce Wayne "I've been in his employ less than a month" had revealed that he was now in Carver's household and that was probably Haliburt's pawn, the person who had phoned Haliburt when Alfred and Maxwell left the party). All of them were turning to look at the door when the Batman complained his cold and placed both feet in the chest of the largest of the card players, who was half-standing, reaching for his hip. Pain crashed. Seven-to-one wasn't impossible odds, particularly when the Batman had the advantage of surprise, but five of his opponents were competent thugs, probably trained and ruthless, he couldn't afford mistakes.

Still on his shoulders, the Batman heaved the chair from under the second card player and as the man tumbled, kicked him precisely under the jaw.

The Batman arched his body and sprang to his feet. The third man, whose right arm was in a sling, and the fourth had revolvers almost clear of shoulder holsters. The fifth man shoved the table into their bodies and, as they gasped and bent over, swept the table to a wide arc behind him, its edge struck the fifth man in the chest as he was moving a Glock handgun at the Batman's head. The gun fired high, the slug passing



well over an hour,
and the Batman let
the movement of
the table spin him

around, but for moving out and slightly
upward to meet the pace of the gamanuk
clot. The man's head snapped and he fell
backward. Before he hit the floor, the Batman
was again facing the third and fourth men,
who were still grasping and clucking their
monarchs. The Batman recognized the
master of the pair as the blackpick artist
who had poisoned his staff. It was a
moment he occasionally experienced,
a moment when alienation stung
and the need for revenge was hot
and pleasurable. Three of them were down.

Halburt and Jacobs were standing by the window, unarmed, staring
trying to comprehend what was happening.

Now, he could afford restraint.

He reached out, grasped the side of the blackpick artist's neck and gently pinched. A painless judo technique

The man sighed and crumpled.

The Batman could never allow himself to experience any satisfaction whatever from violence—not without the terrible
risk of becoming what he despised.

"I gave up." That was from the man with the broken arm, still clutched himself, huddling away from the Batman.

"Very wise." The Batman produced handcuffs from under his cape and tossed them to the kidnapper. "Put these on and wait
for the police."

The Batman did not want to see if he was obeyed.

He turned. Jacobs was staring at him, Halburt at the monitor.

"He's doing it," Halburt whispered. "He's broken the code and he's getting the name."

Halburt would be accused, would perhaps be held by the authorities. But he was rich, and the wealthy had resources, had
would be set, hands paid, wisely competent attorneys enlisted. Even if he were imprisoned, he could maintain his vendetta—

On the screen, the letters were appearing slowly, as though the person typing them were taking enormous care.

TRAITOR'S NAME IS AL

The Batman put the side of his back against the heavy door and strengthened his leg. The door bumped a few feet across the
floor, hit a crack in the concrete and toppled—

"No?" Halburt shrieked, raising his bulk from the chair.

The Batman shoved him back.

And the monitor toppled and hit the floor and exploded. The lights flickered. Halburt stared at the hole that had been the
computer.

"I'll get the name—I will," he mumbled.

"Perhaps," the Batman replied.

He looked by the prisoners and a few seconds later they were free.

"Listen, fella, I've got to thank you." Maxwellton said, rubbing his wound.

"Don't bother," the Batman said.

He stepped to the door and faded into the darkness.

"—according to the morning newspaper, poor old Carthan was found sprawled on the floor by his computer," Alfred was
saying as he scurried waffle batter the next day. "They say the machine was shut off."

"Oh huh," Bruce said over the rim of his orange juice glass.

"I wonder how he felt those last few seconds."

"I imagine he died happy—at least, he had a smile on his face."

"Master Bruce, how could you possibly—oh, certainly. You were there."

"Someone had to turn off Carthan's computer."

"Then you saw the name?"

Bruce was silent.

"But you won't tell me what it was."

"Only if you really want me to. Do you?"

"Some day, perhaps. When I have finally decided."

"Decided what, Alfred?"

"Which is worse, ignorance or madness."





On the road back to our roots, somebody took a left turn.

Back in the very early 1930s, there were no comic collection shops. In fact, there were no comic books per se — a few reprint collections of popular newspaper strips, but they weren't in any sort of magazine form, and they weren't published periodically.

However, there were the large character pulps: *The Shadow*, *Doc Savage*, *The Spider*... the list goes on and on. These magazines consistently long-prose story (with illustrations) featuring the cover-named character and his incredible exploits. Each issue was rounded out by a couple of back-up stories that maintained the lead feature's tone.

The pulps were these massive toasters, made thick not really by the page count but by the plywood paper they used. To emphasize that thick, you could usually see the chains of wood binding in the paper.

Deeper than enormous influence on pop culture, they really didn't last all that long. However, as it often has been pointed out — most eloquently by Dan Horowitz in the first volume of his *History of Comics* — there is a direct connection between the hero pulps and comics. They were an essential fact, when the comic publishers that started up in the mid-1930s (many of whom were printing pulps as well) cut out of newspaper strip material to reprint, they took their lead from the hero pulps. Quite literally, the hero pulps gave birth to the hero comics.

In the ensuing five decades, the hero pulps evolved into the hero paperback (the likes of *Doc Savage*, *The Spider*, and *Operator 5* gave way to the likes of *Mike Hammer*, *James Bond*, and *Man Hunt*), and the anthology comic gave way to the costumed comic.

What you're holding is something of a return to our roots: a magazine over-formatting an extremely hard boiled hero who dominates the page count, backed by two short stories.

Of course, we're keeping the comics format. Mostly.

MS. TREE QUARTERLY is indeed a comic book, but one that takes much of its influence from the old hero character pulp.

* * * * *

Our lead feature, *Ms. Tree*, is hardly a new-born babe. Indeed, she was the first

successful ongoing feature to be produced in the 1940s — DC and Marvel included — to make it to the 1990s. She got her start in the old *Aviation Monthly*, and went on to star in 93 issues of her own comic book.

The creation of *Max Allan Collins* and Terry Bryant, *Ms. Tree* clearly wears her influences on her sleeve. Her barbed wit, private eye, with a touch of Mickey Spillane and a dash of Raymond. Well, maybe more than just a touch and a dash. Unmistakable, unimpeachable and extremely compelling. *Ms. Tree* has been the most enduring leading private detective in the history of comic books. Only **DETECTIVE COMICS**' *Miss Bradley* — a back-up feature — survived longer, and *Ms. Tree*'s longevity does her credit.

At the time of her creation, Bryant was well known for his work as a cartoonist and columnist for the *Conway Paper's Guide*. And by that point, Collins had about a dozen or so magazines and columns under his belt — not to mention several years of writing *Black Tracy* for the newspaper. Since crossing that frontier, Collins and Bryant managed to find time to create **WILD DOG** for DC, *Max* has written about a million more words, including the award-winning *Nate Heller* series. (Don't worry, we'll be plugging *Max*'s upcoming novels as they come out — right now, his adaptation of the *Black Tracy* movie is about to hit the screen, and his fourth *Nate Heller* novel, *Mean Streets*, will be out in paperback this coming winter; a new *Heller* novel has been completed and will be appearing as backcover art about the same time.)

I don't want to give *Ms. Tree* short credit, but her nearly six years of publication speaks for itself. Indeed, I want to spend a bit of our precious space talking about our other two features.

* * * * *

Midnight was created by Jack Cole (of *Flame*; *Man Hunt*) for the old *Quality* line of comics, under direct orders of his publisher and editor. Let's face it: the original *Midnight* was meant to answer *Will Eisner's* *The Spirit* — a classic even then. *Quality* was reprinting *The Spirit*, and they were concerned that the feature might be undermined (I'm being polite) by *Eisner's* being defined into that little footnote we call *World War II*. Cole was for two reasons to do an imitation of anything, and *Midnight* was quite an interesting feature, even if the hero did look like *The Spirit*.

In recreating *Midnight*, we wanted to take the character to the way from *The Spirit* as

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possible while preserving the more unusual, highly pulp-oriented aspects of the feature. *Max Collins* recommended his friend, the award-winning mystery and western novelist **Ed Gannon** — he'd also the editor of *Mystery* home magazine and of my shadow all-time favorite mystery anthologies, *The Black Lizard Anthologies of Crime Fiction*. *Max* recently, Ed teamed up with Bob Randall to edit *Under the Gun*, another first-time mystery anthology (all three books, by the way, include *Max Collins* stories).

If all you've seen from what Gannon Means is his work on **POWER OF TWO** ATOM or the brand-new, just released **ELANORWORLD** (which he wrote for his own book), then you probably missed his more pulp-oriented work for *Polipol Comics*. Not to worry, a quick look in this story and you'll see why he was my first and only choice to join *Midnight*.

* * * * *

Our Illustrated Story segment is an attempt to take the tables on history when **MS. TREE QUARTERLY** takes an influence from the old hero character pulps. It was only fair to reward me with some credit with an illustrated pulp-like story, featuring several about comic characters in prose form.

We are starting off with *Station*, written by **Deary O'Neil** and illustrated by Mike O'Neil, for the following reason: 1) Deary's quote the police writer, and it's nice to see him narrate that part of his brain once again. 2) Mike's quote the illustrator, something about which most comics fans are unaware, and 3) this is the first issue of an uncompleted female hero comic book, and this story's running *Station*, and we ain't afraid. We're going to give **MS. TREE** every chance we can.

Upcoming stories will be featuring *The Buckner*, the *Dark Detective*, *Investigative Henderson*, *Ghost* in the 20th Century, and *Wild Dog*. Our readers must will include *Mike Burton* and *Steve Aronson*, *John Conner* and *William Shesman-Lewis*, *John Oakley* and *Dary Oakley*, *John Byrne* and *John Byrne*, and *Max Collins* and *Deary O'Neil*. *Max* and *Deary* (O'Neil, as they call it) *Terry Bryant* illustrating *Wild Dog*? Hey, do you hear any idea how long it takes a person to print and ink all pages? Well, most stories take slightly longer than three months... which poses a problem if you're doing a book called **MS. TREE** (204878181).

The talented *Deary Means* — of *Editor's* and *THE PRISONER* fame — is our designer on this series, handling the look of

the words and pictures. As an director's dream... or, perhaps more accurately, an editor's dream and possibly an art director's nightmare. Anyway, *Death* makes a valuable and (in the world of comics) unique contribution to our series of Illustrated Stories.

* * * * *

Most comic books need a cover (not all; check out *Wired* or *Against Nature*), and in keeping with our pulp influences, we've decided to do with cover paintings here on *MS. TREE QUARTERLY*. Mike Gold looks off our cover, and Mike will be back before too long. Denis Cowan (who's also doing cover paintings on *THE QUESTION QUARTERLY*) and Scott Hampton are next in line.

* * * * *

Overall, we're real proud of *MS. TREE QUARTERLY*. It's quite a challenge, and the way everybody's pulling together to make this concept work is quite a sight to behold. My deepest thanks will be owed.

* * * * *

One of the most popular features in the previous issues of *MS. Tree* comes with the scorching and provocative (and colorful) writing by Mike Collins and sadly titled *Swack!*. The editor knows a good thing when he sees it, and the oft-mentioned Mr. Collins will be returning the *Swack!*

column in our next issue. Therefore, kindly send your letters of consent to:

Swack! / Mr. Tree Quarterly
c/o DC Comics Inc.
444 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10001

After I read 'em, I'll be sending them off to Mike. Let me encourage you to comment on both *Midnight* and our Illustrated Story features as well: we need all the feedback we can get.

* * * * *

A very deep and personal thank you to Mickey Spillane for selflessly, freely and quickly giving us the *MS. TREE* endorsement spots we've been greatly using in our promotion work. Mickey's first book — indeed, his first Mike Hammer novel in two decades — is called *The Killing Man*, and it's like the man never stopped writing the things. If you like *MS. TREE* and you're secret that a Mike Hammer novel, you've only been missing something. Check it out.

* * * * *

One of the regular "features" in each issue of *MS. Tree* comes with an ad from my old friends, Robert and Phyllis Weinberg. These folks have been long writing mystery, pulp, fantasy, and science fiction stuff for years — they're also co-authors of the

novel *Chicago*. Cameron comes on conviction, which happens to be my idea now.

Among the editors of *MS. Tree* they keep in stock just happens to be the complete works of Mike Collins — at least, the stuff that's in print. This includes his mystery prize winner *Elliot Ness*, *Naked*, *Midnight*, *Death*, and the long of the Collins canon, the *Mike Heller* series. The Weinbergs also keep Mike's crime and weird pulps in stock, and they stock Ed Herman's *Black Blood* autobiographies, in book. They probably have some sort of catalog or something, if you're having a hard time finding any up-to-date Collins or Herman titles, try dropping them a letter at 15140 Oakland Drive, Oak Forest Illinois 60453, or call "meat 791 817 5565."

* * * * *

In three months... *MS. Tree* takes off against a massive col in her typical hard back manner, but particularly, she gets a lot faster than she has been for. Which doesn't do much to improve her expected life span, believe me. Collins and Neary at the dining table, death.

Plus... the return of *Midnight*, by Gordon and Mike (the most, not the paperback book), and our second Illustrated Story. And a prelude cover from Deepa Cowan.

Have a nice summer

— Mike Gold

